

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

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[0 : 00] Well, you can turn back to that passage in Matthew chapter 25. We're going to be looking at the parable of the ten virgins tonight. In the early 19th century, there was a free church minister called Andrew Bona.

And one night, when he had finished preaching, he was walking down the pulpit steps and he was met by three of his elders and he started talking with his elders.

And as everyone else was leaving the church, he asked them a question. He said, do you think Christ will return tonight?

And they all kind of thought about it and nobody said anything. So then he started addressing them directly and he asked the first elder, do you think Christ will return tonight? And he thought about it and he said, I think not.

And then the next elder returns to him, what about you? Do you think Christ will return tonight? And he thought about it as well and replied similarly, I think not.

[1 : 12] And then the third one, what about you? Do you think he'll return tonight? Same again, I think not. And then Andrew Bona, he quoted to them a verse from Matthew and he said, therefore, this is in the old version, therefore, be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not, the son of man cometh an hour that ye think not.

I wonder, friends, how you would answer that question. Do you think he's coming tonight? What would your answer be? Well, in a way, that question is of absolutely no use to us whatsoever.

Because we don't know and we're told quite explicitly that we're not going to know. But, you see, something lies, if you like, beneath that question.

There is a question underneath that question. And that question is, are you ready if the Lord, Jesus Christ, returns in all his power, his splendor, his wonder and his glory?

Are you ready for that trumpet sound? Are you ready to be summoned before the judgment seat of God? And that is a question that is very important to us.

[2 : 40] And that is a question that I want us to think about and explore tonight by looking at this parable, the parable of the ten virgins, because it confronts us with that question.

It confronts us with that idea. Are we ready? Are we prepared for that greater day of the Lord?

Because our bridegroom comes at an hour that we do not know.

Now, just by way of context here, this obviously follows on from chapter 24. And at the beginning of chapter 24, you find Jesus leaving the temple.

So he leaves the temple and he heads over to the Mount of Olives. And he's walking there with the rest of his disciples. The disciples are following him and they go and they take a seat in the Mount of Olives.

And they sit there together, if you like, in a private fellowship. And then his disciples ask him, tell us, when will the end of the age be? Tell us these things.

[3 : 44] We want to know. And sitting there in fellowship, discussing these things, he began to open up these truths. And you see it in Matthew 24 there. He began to open up some truths about the imminent future, about the destruction of the temple.

And he began to open up some truths about the second coming of Jesus Christ. Now, the question they asked was, when? That's what they wanted to know.

When? Tell us. When? When are these things going to happen? But he stresses to them, you're not going to know. This is going to be on a day and an hour that no one knows except the Father.

And he's telling them this for one reason. To make sure that they are ready. To make sure that they are prepared for that day.

And he goes on to illustrate this by giving them three parables. And we're looking at one of these parables tonight, the parable of the ten virgins. So let's go through this parable with that mindset of, are we ready?

[4 : 47] Are we prepared for the coming of Jesus? So I've given you three points there on your sheets. Firstly, we're looking at the ten virgins departing.

And you find that in verse 1 to 4. So to understand what's going on here, we're going to have to understand a wee bit of the custom of marriages in that particular day.

A custom of marriages in that particular culture. Now, we are used to the bride dictating the time of our wedding. It's when the bride comes.

That's when the marriage can start. Everyone's waiting. And sometimes there can be a great delay for the bride coming. But here, it was the opposite. It was the groom. It was the groom that dictated when the marriage would start.

And the groom would be, if you like, hovering around somewhere. And when he decided he wanted to come, then he would come. And the marriage would commence. And that could be any time within certain days or even certain weeks.

[6 : 10] So that meant that the bridal party, they had to be constantly ready, constantly prepared, just in case the groom came. And these, if you like, virgins that we have here, they're basically bridesmaids, essentially, in a way.

And their job was to go out and keep a lookout for the groom coming. So they went out and they would keep a watch. And it was their job when they saw the groom coming, they were to go out with their lamps and their lights and usher the groom in.

And this was, if you like, part of the ceremony of the wedding. So that was their job. And the parable really focuses on these ten virgins.

Five of them, we read, were wise. And five of them were fools. And we'll look into exactly why that is. But tonight, as we hear about this, we must ask ourselves, where do we find ourselves?

Do we find ourselves amongst those described as wise? Or do we find ourselves amongst those described as fools? So we must keep that in mind as we're going through that.

[7 : 20] So you've got the ten virgins, and you've also got the bridegroom. Now the bridegroom is quite obviously a picture of Christ. This is all about the return of Jesus. So waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom is looking at the arrival of Jesus Christ.

And as these ten virgins, as they go and get ready for the groom's arrival, you'll notice that they are all preparing. All of them, all ten of them are preparing.

They're all, you know, getting all their gear on and getting ready to go out to take part in this duty that they have. It's not a case of the five wise ones getting ready and the five foolish ones just lounging about, not really bothered, just doing their own thing.

The picture is they're all preparing to some degree. So they're all preparing, and they walk down the road, if you like. And as they walk down, if you had looked at them, these ten virgins, you would have probably been hard pushed to actually tell any difference between them.

They're all dolled up, if you like. They've all got their lamps. They've all got their lights. You'd have been hard pushed to say if there was any difference between them at all. But some of them are wise, and some of them are fools.

[8 : 34] And in all likelihood, in this congregation tonight, there will be some who this parable would describe as being wise, and some who this parable would describe as being fools.

That's the word of God speaking. But when I look out, all I can see is a group of people who are prepared to come to the house of God. I see a group of people prepared to worship God, prepared to hear his word being preached.

I can't make a distinction by looking at you. Just like they couldn't have made a distinction, really, between these ten virgins. But the distinction is there. There's ten wise, and there's five wise, and there's five foolish.

But Jesus tells us, if you like, the key difference. Something that might have gone unnoticed. And he says, the five wise virgins, they've got their flasks by their side.

You might have not noticed that at first, but now you notice it. Oh yes, they have five, if you like, flasks by their side, or somewhere with oil in it. Oil to make sure that their lamps would not go out.

[9 : 42] You see, the foolish had prepared in every other way apart from this. They looked the same as the five wise. Apart from this, they did not have a vessel of oil.

And that is not like forgetting your skin too, or forgetting your handbag when you're going for a wedding. This was a big deal. This was a big deal. Their one job was to usher the bridegroom in with the light of their lamps. That was their one role. Without the light of their lamps, they could not take part in this marriage ceremony. So they had prepared in every other way apart from preparing in the thing that mattered most. They did not have any oil. You see, they aren't fools because they didn't expect the arrival of the groom. They did expect him. They knew he was coming. They are fools because they made no provision for his arrival. And I know tonight as I look out on the congregation, I do not know all of you. [10:56] I've got to know a lot of you, but I do not know all of you. But in all likelihood, there will be some in here tonight who fully expect Jesus to come. If I asked you, will Jesus return?

You will say, yes, he will. Yes, he will. I believe he will. But at the same time, you are completely unprepared for it.

Perhaps you are prepared in lots of other areas of your life. Perhaps you've prepared lots of other things to do with your future. Perhaps you've prepared regarding things about death. Maybe you've got your own burial plot ready. Maybe you've prepared what church that they'll have your funeral service in. Maybe you've prepared what's going to happen to all your possessions and all your money and all these things when death comes. Or perhaps when Jesus comes before then. But maybe you've planned these things. Planned these things to do, if you like, with your body. And yet you have not made preparation for the thing that is most important of all.

[12:04] You have made no preparation for your soul. Is that not crazy? Preparing for what's going to happen to your remains and not thinking about your soul.

What is the difference here between the wise and the foolish? It's the oil. A supply of oil. Which means their lamps will continue to burn.

Now, you have to be careful with parables. It's very tempting and very easy to overdo parables and spiritualize every last little detail of it.

And you do have to be careful of that. But whenever you hear about oil in the Bible, your mind just straight away goes to the Holy Spirit. Straight away. Because you see it all over the Bible.

This picture of oil being like a symbol, if you like, of the Holy Spirit. And that is the hidden oil that some of you possess tonight. Is your soul a vessel for the Holy Spirit of God?

[13:11] Is your soul a vessel for God? Do you possess Christ? Or is your soul empty and dead?

We have to ask that question. This is serious. We have to ask ourselves that question. Is it filled with Christ or is it completely empty? You see, the foolish, they only really thought about the here and now.

Is that like you? They only care about the present. They were quite happy to have their lamps lit for the present. They were quite happy walking down there with their light shining bright.

With no thought about what was going to happen. No thought about what was ahead of them. And that's something you find in our day and age, is it not?

People, they don't really think about what's up ahead. They don't really think, if you like, about the future. Particularly when it comes to eternal things.

[14:15] And there are so many distractions. So many things. Your TV, your MP3 players, an iPhone. Everything to stop you thinking about anything. Very seldom do you see someone just walking down the street.

Particularly in Glasgow where we are. Hardly anyone is just walking down there thinking to themselves. They're all plugged into something or listening to something. Some kind of distraction to stop them thinking.

And that's the kind of generation we live in. They don't think about eternal matters. They don't think about the whole concept of death.

Do you think about these things? Some people, they stand at a graveside even.

We've been there the last few weeks. They'll see a coffin being lowered down. And they won't really believe that that's going to happen to them. But the reality is that death is coming for us.

[15:12] And we must make provision unless Jesus comes before them. And that is the difference between the wise and the foolish.

The wise prepare. The foolish do not. And that leads us to a second point. With the bridegroom approaching. See that in verse 5 there.

As the bridegroom was delayed. They all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry. Here is the bridegroom. Come out to meet him. So we see the bridegroom delaying in this coming.

And this delay means that the ten virgins. They're getting a wee bit drowsy. It's getting a bit dark outside. Getting a bit late. They're getting a wee bit sleepy.

And there's a sense in which the longer the groom is taking. The less the sense of expectation that is actually going to come. The sense of expectation gets less and less.

[16:11] Until eventually they fall asleep. All ten of them. They fall into a sleep. And then just when they're least expected. He comes.

At midnight. When they're all asleep. The very moment where expectation levels might have been at an all time low. That's when he came. And he comes with this cry.

They are woken up with the announcement of his arrival. And is that not what it's going to be like with Christ's return? This is what it's going to be like. You see in the days of the apostles.

They expected that Christ was going to return any moment now. They thought it was imminent. The expectation levels were through the roof if you like. But you see as the years go by.

And as you look at the history of the church. That sense of expectation dwindles. Over time. Now and again it peaks. Because of certain providences or certain events. But generally over time.

[17:12] The sense of expectation reduces and reduces. And it's as though the church becomes drowsy. And they almost fall asleep. And they don't actually think he's coming.

And I would suggest that that's where we are today. The church not actually expecting. That Jesus will return. But Jesus is telling us here in these surrounding verses.

That that is exactly when he will come. When we least expect it. There's an element of surprise when the groom comes.

You pick that up from the parable. And there will be an element of surprise when Jesus comes. For many of us. It will be a surprise of great joy. And a surprise if you like.

Of a longing and a gladness to see Jesus coming. But for other people. It will be a very different surprise.

[18:12] It will be a surprise. It will be a surprise. Full of panic. And full of horror. And full of sorrow. As we realize. The day of salvation.

Has come to an end. They are woken up here. By the cry of the groom's arrival. Now we will all go home tonight. God willing. And we will go to our beds.

When you go to close your eyes tonight. Ask yourself that very question. What if Jesus comes before I wake?

What if I am awoken by his arrival? What if it isn't my alarm that wakes me up in the morning. But the great sound of the trumpet. Am I ready?

Am I prepared for that? Have I come to the Lord Jesus Christ? Seeking forgiveness. Have I come in repentance? Putting my faith and trust in Jesus?

[19:17] If not, why not? Friends, why not? How can you have any peace when you go to sleep at night? Knowing that you are not prepared.

How can you close your eyes knowing that any moment he could come back and that's it? Our chance has gone.

Well, these virgins, they all wake up. And they're scrambling to trim their lamps. And it's at that point the foolish realize what's happened.

They realize that sinking feeling in your stomach. They realize, we haven't got enough oil. They realize that they are not prepared for their groom's arrival.

And they're panicking. And their mind is probably going into overdrive. Thinking, how on earth are we going to, what are we going to do here? How are we going to get through this dilemma? And then they look over to the wise.

[20:21] And perhaps they didn't notice it before. But they definitely notice it now. They see, oh the wise, they've got vessels with them, with oil. We didn't perhaps see that before. Why did we not bring vessels with oil?

And they're panicking. And the reality of what this means is slowly dawning on them. They're realizing, we are too late. We are too late.

We are not going to be able to take part in this marriage ceremony. If we don't have our lights and our lamps, we cannot take part. What are we going to do? And in their panic, they turn to the wise.

They turn to the wise and they say, give us some of your oil. We need some of your oil. But the wise, they turn to them and say, no.

We have only got enough for ourselves. You need to go and buy your own. Friends, this issue of being ready for the arrival of Jesus is between you and him.

[21 : 25] It doesn't matter how many Christians you know. It doesn't matter supposing your whole family, the rest of your family is Christian. It doesn't matter supposing you know hundreds of Christians. It doesn't matter supposing you've been in this church all your life.

On that day, when that trumpet sounds, you cannot turn to them. You cannot turn to your loved ones in Christ and say, bail me out here.

You cannot turn to them and say, give us a wee bit of Christ's righteousness so I can get in. You cannot get them to share their salvation with you.

You cannot even get them to plead your case. You cannot turn to them. You cannot turn to them. You cannot turn to them. Time has run out.

This is between you and God. Nobody else can help you at that point. You cannot appeal to them at all.

[22 : 24] And then these foolish virgins, they head off and try and buy some oil. But it's midnight. Middle of the night. Where on earth are they going to buy some oil?

It's getting dark. Their lights are going out. What on earth are they doing? They're panicking here. They're panicking, scrambling in the middle of the night, trying to find some place, if you like, to buy some oil.

But it's a waste of time. And probably deep down they know it's a waste of time. Deep down they'll probably know, we're not going to make it. There is no way that we can get in here.

But we'll do all we can. We'll scramble about trying somehow to get in to this marriage ceremony. You see, some things just cannot be left to the last minute.

Perhaps you leave things to the last minute. Well, you cannot leave this to the last minute. Are you honestly saying to me, if some think this, that you are happy to leave these things till later on in life?

[23 : 28] Do you understand the risk of that? Do you understand just the urgency of this matter?

That this needs dealt with now. We cannot put this off. Imagine that sinking feeling if we put it off on that trumpet sound.

Friends, some people are going to feel that. And I hope and pray that nobody in here will feel that. Unconverted friend, will you not prepare for this day?

You're not going to be able to scramble around at the last minute. This parable is telling us that. You can't scramble around at the last minute and somehow get into this kingdom. Somehow get into the new heaven and the new earth that we were thinking about last week.

That is not going to be possible. There's no warning that he is going to arrive. There's no heads up that this trumpet is going to sound. It will come. And it will come as a shock and a surprise.

[24 : 37] It will come at a time when you do not expect it. Whether that be the return of Jesus or whether it be the trumpet sound of death itself. Are we prepared?

Perhaps you're sitting there thinking, I don't think any of that is true. I don't honestly think that there's going to be a last day. I don't honestly think that this trumpet is going to sound.

What's this guy on about? Perhaps you're thinking, I'm just going to enjoy life. As my heart beats within me, I'm going to make sure I make the most of this life.

But really, you can't. Because you know deep down that you are not right with God. You might pretend to yourself that, ah, these things are fine, I'll ignore them.

But you know deep down you aren't right with God. And you know deep down that if that trumpet were to sound tonight, that you are in a great deal of trouble.

[25 : 36] Do you want joy and peace in life? It's yours in Christ. It is yours on offer today in the gospel. Trust in him. And you'll have joy and peace that literally passes all understanding.

Imagine going to bed at night knowing that you are right with God. And knowing that what awaits you is the glory of the new heavens and the new earth. When you wake up in the morning and when you get up and when you go to bed each night knowing that you are prepared for that day.

That is peace that passes all understanding. A peace that no one else can have except a Christian. And we preach the gospel to you for that very reason.

We don't want this just for ourselves. We want everyone to have it. Thirdly, the door is shut.

Verse 10 there. And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast. And the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

[26 : 47] But he answered, truly I say to you, I do not know you. We started off, if you like, by looking at these virgins walking out and saying, well, it's quite hard to see any difference between them.

But here at the end of this parable, there is no difficulty in distinguishing them. There is a clear division that has come in. A clear and visible division of the wise and the foolish.

There is no mixing of the two now. They are separated by this door. And that is a division that will take place in this community here. It is a division that will take place perhaps even within ourselves gathered here tonight.

A division within this congregation here in Noc. Two men will be in the field. One will be taken. The other left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken. And the other left. We don't see that division now. But a day will come when it will be evident. We sometimes see shadows of it.

[27 : 49] You see that, don't you, when we administer the Lord's Supper. You see, if you like, a shadow of that division. We have the Lord's table. And, you know, usually you sit beside your families in church or your neighbors perhaps.

But when we come to the Lord's table, there is a separation. Families are separated. Some are at the table. Some are not. Husbands and wives are separated. Some are at the table. Some are not. Neighbors and friends are separated. It's a sign, if you like, a shadow of that great separation that will come. And I always think that at the Lord's table.

It is an illustration to us of that division. And we should always think about that when we're sitting there, seeing these things.

And there's a degree of finality about this closed door, isn't there? And other doors in Scripture open up to us. Remember when Jesus said, ask, and it will be given, seek, and you will find, knock, and it will be opened.

[28 : 56] But not this door. Not this door. Doesn't matter how much you knock. Doesn't matter how much you shout. Not this door will not be opened.

And these virgins, as they stand, these foolish virgins, when they come to the door and it's closed in their face, they realize, we are not getting in here. We aren't getting in.

Because we didn't prepare. You see, when Adam was thrown out of the garden, when he sinned, that door was in a sense closed on him. God closed it saying, you're not coming back in here.

But God didn't leave man. He opened up a new way. He opened up a way that cost him the blood of his own son. He opened up a way through Jesus Christ.

The closed door of Eden, if you like, was reopened. By Jesus. But, you see, this door. That closes on this last day. This door that will close with the sound of that trumpet.

[29 : 57] There is no opening it. We must understand that there is not going to be a, well, it's not even a second chance. It would be a third chance. There is going to be no way that that door opens again.

And that is a comfort, actually, to those who are inside. Because we know that we'll never leave it again. But, it is a cause for eternal despair and sorrow for those on the other side of that door.

Christian friend, when we enter in, like the wise virgins, when we enter in with the groom, we know that we'll never be leaving again. We know that there will never be a second fall. We know that God will never allow any more evil in through this door.

But, it's closed. There will be no serpents coming in to test us again. Behind that closed door, we are eternally safe.

And, as we look, if you like, at the door from the inside, we see that inscription, Welcome to the new heavens and the new earth. But, for those on the other side, the inscription that we read off here is, Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.

[31 : 10] A decisive rejection. I hope that no one in here hears those words. Imagine hearing those words from God. I do not know you.

Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. They knew he was coming, but they weren't prepared.

Imagine that realization on that day. Imagine it. When you realize the day of opportunity is no more. You got so used to hearing the gospel message, so used to thinking, Oh, that's the gospel. It's there for me. It's on offer. I will grab it someday. But, imagine the day when you realize, No, it's not going to be on offer anymore. The day of opportunity has ended. And, arguably, we in here, we know more of that day of opportunity than most of the people in this world.

Most of the people that have ever been. Because we are hearing the gospel week in, week out. We are presented with Jesus week in, week out.

[32 : 20] Many people in this world, even now, don't get this. In fact, the vast majority, a tiny minority, get the gospel as often as we do. And if you find yourself on the wrong side of that door, when that trumpet sound calls, I imagine all things will come flooding back to you.

Gospel messages will come flooding back to you. Things that struck you, right at your heart, will come flooding back to you. Messages from your minister here, perhaps, or from others. And you'll think, Why?

Oh, why? Did I do nothing about it? Why did I not put my faith in Jesus? It doesn't matter how great your sin is.

It doesn't matter how stained your past is. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter how many times you've rejected the gospel before. Tonight, Jesus comes to you afresh and he says, Put your faith in me.

Because I have lived a life that you cannot live. I have died a death that you cannot die. And I have opened a door that you cannot open.

[33 : 31] A door to eternal peace and security in heaven. A door that one day will close to us all.

My prayer is that God, through the power of his Holy Spirit, would not just make you realize your need of Christ, but that you would realize the urgency of that need.

I cannot save you. The minister cannot save you. We cannot drag you into the kingdom of God. If we could, we would. For your good. But we can't. We tell you the way.

We show you the way. We tell you of Jesus Christ, and we leave it with you, praying that you will put your trust in him, and that you would know this peace that passes all understanding.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the offer of the gospel.

[34 : 46] We thank you, O God, that we can hear the wonderful good news of what Jesus Christ has done for sinners. We thank you, O God, that you have opened our eyes to the truth of your word.

We know how blinding sin is, but we know that your power is able to take away all that sense of blindness and help us to see the wonder and beauty of Jesus Christ.

And our prayer is tonight that all of us in here would be prepared for that day to come, whether it come by death or whether it come with a trumpet sound.

May we all be able to say, we are ready. And may we not just be content with that, but may we go out and tell others to be ready also. Help us to think on these things.

In Jesus' name. Amen.